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O B S E R V A T I O N S .

O N T H E

S E N T I M E N T S

O F

B I S H O P L O W T H,

IN HIS *TWENTY-FIRST LECTURE*

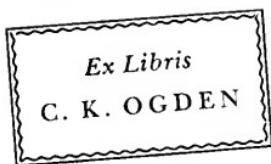
DE SACRA POESI HEBRAEORUM,

CONCERNING THE

F O U R T H E C L O G U E

O F

V I R G I L.



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O B S E R V A T I O N S, &c.

WHOEVER will compare the three prophecies contained in the second, eleventh, and fifty-fifth chapters of Isaiah, with the fourth eclogue of Virgil, can hardly doubt: whether the same images—united in combinations opposite to the analogies of nature, applied to similar subjects, and, by both writers, in the way of prediction—must not have ultimately originated in a common source; and the latter been derived from the former. If so, the agreement in question may be rationally accounted for, without recurring to “a mysterious influence” “on the mind of the Poet;” especially should it appear that the Poet himself hath referred to the Jewish Scriptures, as the fountain of such images, in the same manner as to the writings of Homer, for others of Grecian origin. [See GEORG. iii. 12; and the *Note on VAUHEK*, p. 269.]—It seems, however, by his Lordship’s concession, that the necessity for supposing “a mysterious influence” would vanish, could it once be shown, that the prophecy of Virgil were applicable to any child whose birth was expected at the time of his writing, different from him whom the Prophet had foretold. But though no such application could at this distance be traced, it is sufficient to destroy the hypothesis of an influence from above, by observing that, in respect to our Saviour, the

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prediction was false, as the pregnancy of the Virgin did not commence till long after Pollio was consul. But who then was the child foretold? — His Lordship having exploded the pretensions of Servius and others, in favour of any son of Pollio; and remarked that the Poet's prophecy would neither suit the age, nor situation, of Drufus or Marcellus *; readily admits its congruity, so far as a *son* is concerned, to the child with which Scribonia was at that time pregnant. Here the difficulty with his Lordship begins. For, how, considering the situation of Octavius at this period, could *his* child be the subject of such a prediction? — Why, in predicting the future greatness of a son of *Octavius*, should Virgil address his prediction to *Pollio*? — And, supposing these difficulties solved, how can the *language* of the prediction itself be reconciled to the *subject* of it?

Let us take each question in its order. 1. In stating the situation of Octavius, his Lordship hath unwarily admitted a succession of facts, which, being posterior to the time when the Eclogue was written, could not be foreknown by Virgil, and therefore ought not to have been brought into question. In the year 714, when all the horrors of civil discord were impending over Italy, a reconciliation was suddenly effected between Antony and Octavius, at the intervention of Cœlius, Pollio, and Mæcenas. The result of this treaty was

* The advocates for Marcellus, and especially Catrou, would have done well to remember, that Marcellus was adopted by Augustus, on his marriage with Julia in 729, and not before. This fact we have from Plutarch: Τούτοι μὲν ἈΜΑ παῦδα καὶ γαμβόποι εποιησάτο.

a new partition of the Roman world, by which Africa, as Octavius had assigned it, was left to Lepidus ; and Antony, who was to have all between Scodra and the Euphrates, further relinquished, in addition to what he had already ceded, his two most valuable provinces, Spain and Gaul. This convention being amicably ratified, nothing was now left in the west to thwart the aims of Octavius : for, though Pompey still remained hostile, it was contrary to his own desire ; and by express stipulation, on the part of Octavius, with Antony.

[*APPIAN. de bell. Civil. v. 66, Dio. xlviij. 374.*] When this Eclogue then was written, Octavius was master of Italy and that part of the empire which, under its own name, comprehended the world. At peace with his colleague abroad, having nothing to apprehend at home, and invested with power to compose those commotions by which the empire had been so lately convulsed, what might not Octavius hope —or, what might not the flattery of a Poet, who in circumstances less favourable had styled him a God, now prompt his aspiring mind, and, on the ground of a divine prediction, to expect—would be the future greatness of his son ?

But, 2. it is asked : Why Virgil on such an occasion should address this prediction to Pollio, who had not been the friend of Octavius, but of Antony ?

In answer to this inquiry, it may be observed, that the private misunderstanding, alledged by his Lordship to have arisen between Pollio and Octavius, a year or more *after* Pollio had been consul, is totally beside the question ; except as it serves to shew that, from the peace of Brundisium till the rise

of this disagreement, Octavius and Pollio were friends ; and even, that, after it, Octavius was regarded by Pollio in no worse a light than Antony himself. [Paterculus ii. 86.] But, whatever political enmity might have existed between them prior to that treaty, they were both unanimous in the patronage of genius. It was whilst Pollio held the territory of Venice for Antony, that his acquaintance with Virgil commenced ; and as the splendour of the Poet's talents, which broke through the obscurity of his condition, had attracted the notice of Pollio ; so, by his means, they obtained the favour of Octavius : for it is agreed on all hands, that Pollio, either in person, or by the intervention of some friend (perhaps Varus, see Ecl. ix.), brought Virgil to the knowledge of Octavius ; who restored to him his patrimony which the soldiers had usurped. Yet, widely as Octavius and Pollio might have differed before the treaty of pacification, there is no reason to suppose them, after its confirmation, upon any other than an intimate footing ; at least, till that *private* misunderstanding to which his Lordship hath adverted. Now, what could be more natural, what more consistent with the nicest address, than that Virgil, whose poetic talents had first procured him the protection of Pollio, and by his means the munificence of Octavius, should offer through his first patron, who was not only at this time consul, but had been chiefly instrumental, by negotiating the peace, to the establishment of Octavius in power, a poetic compliment to his greater benefactor, on a prediction believed to point out his son ?

Having thus answered two of the questions proposed, it

remains to consider the third. Virgil, in the first Eclogue, which was written on regaining his estate, confines himself chiefly to his own concerns and those of his Mantuan neighbours; but, in the present, his voice is raised to a loftier strain. The *arbusia humilisque ryricie* are the concerns of private life contrasted with *Sylvae*, such as belong to the empire: thus, Rome is said, in the first Eclogue, “to rear her head as high above other cities, as the tall cypresses above the lowly shrubs.”—*Si canibus sylvas, &c.* “If the woods be my theme, let the woods be worthy of a consul.” This imagery is by no means casual; for we learn from Suetonius (*Jul. Cæs. c. xix.*) that the woods had been lately made a consular care:—*Ultima Cumæi venit jam carminis ætas:* “The last age of the Cumæan prophecy is now come.” It is agreed on all hands, how differently soever the prediction was applied, that a prediction of a king, about this time to appear, was really contained in the Sibylline verses. Hence, not only Lentulus, as Sallust relates, was incited to engage in Catiline’s conspiracy, and frequently vaunted that the king thus foretold would arise in the Cornelian family; but we learn from Cicero, that the official Interpreter of these oracles was publickly expected to apply this prediction, in the Senate, to Cæsar: and Suetonius affirms, that the Senate, afterward, were so terrified at the approaching appearance of this prophetic sovereign, as to decree, ‘That no male infant born within the year his birth was expected, should be brought up.’ Now, since it is well known that an expectation had long prevailed throughout the East, of some extraordinary personage, who

should establish universal empire, may it not be presumed that, the prophecy, which gave rise to this expectation, was brought to Rome, by those whom the Senate deputed to collect, in various countries, and the East in particular, traditional predictions, to supply the loss of the Sibylline, which were burnt? —But, were it otherwise, the affinity between the Sibylline prediction and the Eastern oracle—which, according to Tacitus, [Hist. v. 13.] was referred by many to the JEWISH SCRIPTURES—is such as can leave no room for surprize, if we see Virgil, on the presumption of both having a common aim, adopt the one to adorn the other: for, as the former was thought applicable to Julius, and the latter to Vespasian, why might not Virgil have consolidated both, and applied them to the son of Octavius? And, if Tacitus had a knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures, why might not Virgil have also? The intercourse between the Romans and Jews * could scarce leave it possible that the Jewish Scriptures, at least in the Greek version, should have remained

* The connection between the Jews and the Romans was both earlier and closer than is commonly supposed. In the Antiquities of Josephus, xii. 10. 6. a decree of the Senate, which was enacted a hundred and fifty years before the Christian æra, exhibits the most intimate alliance between the two nations. [1 Maccab. viii.] Nor is this the only one. The same concord was frequently confirmed by subsequent decrees, and both the Jews and their religion were patronized in so extraordinary a manner by Julius Cæsar himself, that at his death those of the Jewish nation at Rome lamented him not only more than any other foreigners, but even than the very Romans.—From the brevity and turn of Horace's allusions (not to mention those of Juvenal) it is obvious that the Romans in general were no strangers to the contents of the Jewish Scriptures.

unknown to so inquisitive a writer ; and upon every principle of just construction, if the MUSES and the AONIAN mount be emblematical of the GRECIAN poesy, his IDUMÆAN psalms must equally signify the PROPHETIC STRAINS of the JEWS. [See Georg. iii. 12.]—*Ultima ætas*, &c. “The last age of “the Cumæan prediction is now come.” Whatever were the particulars of this prediction, or whencesoever derived, the time set for its completion coincides with that in the Scriptures†. *Magnus*, &c. “The great order of ages again be-“gins : the Virgin is already returning : the Saturnian rule “returns.” This commencement of the ages perfectly agrees with Isaiah, who styles the child he foretells, “The Fa-“ther of the age to come.” By the return of Astræa, Virgil alludes to the justice he had himself experienced at the hands of Octavius. The renewal of the Saturnian rule will be best explained by referring to the Poet’s account of its former state :

*It gerus indecile ac dispersum montibus altis
Carpit, legisque ducit, Latiumque vocari
Manuit, his quoniam latuisset ratus in oris.
Aurea quæ peribent, illo sub rege furunt
Secula : sic placida populus in pace regebat.* *Aen. viii. 321.*

“ He (Saturn) by just laws embodied all the train,
“ Who ream’d the hills, and drew them to the plain :

† The Sibylline oracles in their present condition are so sophisticated, that no stress can be rested on their testimony without the support of collateral evidence. It will deserve to be considered ; if the Heathens ever possessed a genuine prophecy, which came not from the Jews or the Christians. ²

" There fix'd ; and Latium call'd the new abode,
 " Whose friendly shores conceal'd the latent God.
 " These realms in peace the monarch long control'd,
 " And bles'd the nations with an age of gold."

Jam nova progenies cælo demittitur alto : " A new progeny is
 " now sent down from high heaven." *Sent down*, in opposition
 to the manner of Saturn's descent :

—*ab ætherio venit Saturnus Olympos,*
Arma Jovis fugiens, et regnis exsul ademptis.

"—Saturn fled before victorious Jove,
 " *Driven down* and banish'd from the realms above."

The aid of Lucina is invoked in favour, *nascenti pueru*, " of
 " the boy when he comes to the birth." It is not improbable
 that Virgil was induced to apply the Sibylline prediction to
 this expected son of Octavius, from Isaiah's having dwelt so
 minutely on the *infancy* of the person foretold.—*Quo ferrea*
primum, &c. " with whom the iron age" (or *age of war*)
 " shall cease, and the golden age shall rise over the world."—
 Though Virgil, when Scribonia, instead of a son, was deli-
 vered of a daughter, discovered his mistake as to the *PERSON*
predicted, he still continued confident in respect to the *events*,
 and therefore when he resumed the prophecy, from a persua-
 sion that he could not a second time err, he makes the Sibyl
 herself point out Augustus, as the person so often promised :

—*Hic Cæsar, et omnes Iuli*
Progenies, magnum cæli ventura sub axem.
Hic vir, hic est, tibi quem promitti sepius audis,
Augustus Cæsar, Divi genus : aurea condet

*Secula qui ruras Latinas regnata per arva
Saturni querdam; saepe et Galamantias et Indos
Prefecit imperium, &c.*

AEn. vi. 792.

“ Turn, turn thine eyes ! see here thy race divine,
Behold thy own imperial Roman line .
“ Caesar, with all the Julian name survey ;
“ See where the glorious ranks ascend to day !—
“ This—this is he ! the chief so long foretold,
“ To his is the land where Saturn ruled of old,
“ And give the Latian realms a second age of gold !
“ The promis'd prince, Augustus the divine,
“ Of Caesar's race, and Jove's immortal line !
“ This mighty chieft his empire shall extend
“ O'er Indian realms, to earth's remotest end.” *

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Till, however, a daughter was born, Virgil remained undeceived. The mention of the golden age rising again over the world, is sufficient proof that the Virgin before described as returning, was Astraea ; and as he asserts that, her latest footsteps on earth were discernable in rural retreats :

* The substitution noticed by Strabo, of Ήριόν for Τρωΐστων—*shall reign over ALL NATIONS*, instead of *over the Trojans*—in the following passage :

Nύστος δὲ Αὐγοῦσα σει τρωΐστων ἀρχήσῃ,
Καὶ πάντας τοῖδας, ταὶ καὶ μαντίς γενέσθαι.

was probably made by Virgil, who translated it :

*Hoc dicit Aeneas cureris dñebitum orbem,
Et mecum tuum, et qui natus es eum—*

Both to favour the presumed descent of Augustus from Eneas, and the plan of the Aeneid, as founded upon it.

—extrema per illos
Justitia excedens terris vestigia fecit.

Georgic. ii. 472.

“—last with you
 “ Justitia linger’d, ere she quite withdrew.”

So by adding, “Apollo now reigns,” he seems to intimate, that the powers of poetry had triumphed over oppression, and procured him the interposition of justice, in the restoration of his pasture and flocks. But, though this interpretation may consist with the context, the tenth verse will admit of a fuller sense. After invoking aid from Lucina, it is added, “thy own Apollo now reigns,” that is, *the Sibylline prediction is begun to be fulfilled.* As Apollo was the God of prophecy, it was in reference to his reigning under this character that, Lucina is invoked to assist in the fulfilment of the prediction himself had inspired, by granting to the child a propitious birth. *Teque adeo, &c.* “And in thy consulship, o Pollio! “in thine, shall the glory of this age begin to come forward, and “the great months thence to proceed.” “The glory of this “age” (the *age predicted*) “shall begin to come forward.” It was in the consulship of Pollio that the marriage of Octavius to Scribonia took place, the *great months* therefore are *the months of her pregnancy*, which at this time was advancing. *Te duce, &c.* “Under your management, if any vestiges of “our wickedness remain, they shall be effaced, and the world “delivered”—This plainly refers to the influence of Pollio in negotiating the treaty at Brundisium, and the further exertion of his distinguished talents.—*Ille Deum vitam accipiet,*

&c. “ He shall receive the life of gods,” &c. Similar, though still bolder, expressions are applied to Augustus in the first Georgic, verse 24.—*Pacatumque reget patriis virtutibus orbem.* “ And shall govern the world at peace with his “ FATHER’s virtues.” To whom could this apply but a son of Octavius, and the son whom, it was believed, the prediction had foretold? Hence follows the description of the golden age corresponding with the imagery of Isaiah, to verse 26. *At simul, &c.* “ But soon as thou shalt be able to read “ the praises of heroes, and the achievements of thy father, “ and to understand what the energy of valour can effect, the “ spacious field shall by degrees become yellow with the soft “ ear.” That is, before you be old enough to view on those plains, which have so lately been the theatre of heroism and horror, the devastations of civil discord, its vestiges shall gradually disappear, and the tranquil occupations of husbandry conceal them. *Pauca tamen suberunt priscae vestigia fraudis, &c.* “ But there shall remain beneath the surface “ some traces of ancient fraud,” This obviously alludes to the conduct of Pompey, especially in respect to Sardinia, which so much incensed Octavius, that he not only rejected the mediation of Antony (who had bound himself by oath to reconcile him), but even covenanted in the treaty of Brundisium to pursue Pompey with war. [APPIAN. *de bell. civil.* v. 66. DIO. xlviij. 374.] *Erunt etiam altera bella, atque iterum ad Trojam magnus mittetur Achilles.* “ There shall also “ be other hostilities and the great Achilles shall again be “ sent to Troy.” These “ other hostilities” have a pro-

spective allusion to the war against the Parthians, which, being undertaken, like the Trojan war, for the revenge of perfidy, induced the Poet to style their country, “ Troy ;” and Antony, who was to wage it “ the great Achilles.”

[*APPIAN. de bell. civil. v. 65.*] Of verses 32-3-4, no appropriate explanation can be given ; for, unless we allow Virgil the spirit of prophecy, he could have meant nothing determinate by them. The Poet, after this, resumes the images expressive of the golden age as before.—*Care Deum joboles, magnum Jovis incrementum, &c.* “ O beloved offspring “ of the Gods, great increase of Jove ! ” &c. is not only consonant to the language of scriptural prediction, but in the sense of Virgil befitting to none but a *Cæsar*. [See the 6th *Æneid* and 2d *Georgic* before referred to.]

There are other passages of the Eclogue which, in this attempt at illustration, have been omitted, for the sake of brevity, although they would have reflected additional light on the interpretation which is here offered. Such images of the Poet as approach nearest to those of the Prophet are also purposely passed over ; because, both in Virgil and Isaiah, they have no specific destination ; but are used as generally symbolical of innocence and happiness : and that this was the more obvious mode of explaining the prophetic scriptures is certain ; for the Jews, from those very images in the Prophet, have constantly inferred, that their promised Messiah would be a *temporal* sovereign.

But there will be no necessity to enlarge on this head ; for notwithstanding what is advanced in the Lecture, on the in-

congruity of Virgil's language to his subject, upon any other idea than that of a mysterious relation to the Messiah and his kingdom ; it is the voluntary concession of his Lordship in the note, " that no person could be any where found more worthy of this prophetic Eclogue, nor whom it would more aptly fit, or with whom its contents would better quadrate, than a son of Octavius, provided it could be shewn that a son was born to him, in the year when Pollio was consul." Now, though it be impossible to supply the proof which his Lordship requires ; yet, so far as the spirit of the postulate is concerned, a satisfactory answer can be given. For notwithstanding upon my hypothesis (which perfectly harmonizes with the history of facts) Octavius had no child, till the year after Pollio was consul*, and then only a daughter ; yet, as Scribonia became pregnant in the consulship of Pollio, and the Eclogue was written in that very year, Virgil (whatever the coincidences of the time with the Sibylline prediction might have led him to expect) certainly could not know, without the gift of prescience, the sex of this unborn child.

* The following statement of facts from Appian and Dio will place this matter in the clearest light :—The consulship of Pollio commenced with the year 714 ; about the middle of that year, Octavius married Scribonia ; towards the close of it, the treaty of Peace was confirmed ; and early in the following year, Julia was born.—Professor HEANEY, from verses 11 and 61, concludes that the birth of the child foretold, was expected to happen in 714 ; but it is evident from verse 10, that the 61st must be taken prophetically, and there is nothing in verse 11 to carry back the pregnancy so far as his position demands..

After the explicit opinion which the learned Prelate hath delivereded in the Lecture, concerning the Eclogue in question*, I fear the discussion here offered may incur the charge of temerity; but, as the subject seemed not to have been considered with sufficient circumspection, I was willing to submit it in a new point of view, with the hope that others might favorably receive, what appeared to myself convincing.

* *Quid fuerit ipsius Poetæ consilium, quæ mens, quanquam hic multum se se exercuerint doctissimorum virorum ingenia, tamen nec adhuc sciri arbitror, neque spem babeo fore ut unquam clare investigetur.* DE SACRA POESI HEBRAeorum, p. 290.

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